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JIMMY SMITH '03

Number Four

AVENGERS/JLA

BUSIEK • PÉREZ

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His Name Is Krona...

Ruthless, immortal, he seeks the secret of creation. A glimpse of the formation of his own universe, of stars swirling in a cosmic hand, has set him on a quest to learn the truth at any cost. Cast from his home reality, he wanders the multiverse, destroying realities in his desire to see what gives them birth.

In time, he encounters the Grandmaster, who seeks to preserve his reality by challenging Krona to a game. Tempted by the prize -- the secrets of Galactus, a being who lived through the Big Bang -- Krona agrees. The game is played out by the Avengers and the Justice League, the champions of two universes --

-- but the game is a feint, a ruse that allows the Grandmaster to assemble twelve artifacts of great power. When Krona loses, he attacks the Grandmaster and begins to seize his prize. But the Grandmaster uses the artifacts to bring the two universes together, trapping Krona between them.

Krona is trapped -- but not helpless. Now he has the artifacts -- and he uses them to force the universes closer together, beginning to merge them into one.

The effect is cataclysmic. The realities are incompatible. Reality begins to warp unpredictably. Upheavals threaten to destroy both.

The JLA and the Avengers, their memories changing as reality does, discover the truth and stave off disaster temporarily. They make their way to the Grandmaster, finding him wounded, weak.

They learn what their realities were -- what they should be. And they're shocked by their true history, which holds not only heroism and triumph, but death, madness and loss. Hardest hit are Yellowjacket and the Wasp, who see their marriage fail, the Flash and Green Lantern, who see themselves die, and the Vision and the Scarlet Witch, who see children torn from them, lost forever.

Still, they choose to fight. To restore the truth. They'll have to do it without the Grandmaster, though. The Grandmaster is dead...

PROLOGUE:
YOU SEE? YOU SEE?
THEY KNEW THEY WERE DYING, THE PEOPLE OF TAA! KNEW THEIR UNIVERSE WAS DOOMED!
BUT THEY DID NOT GO QUIETLY. THEY FOUGHT--TO THE END!
THE LAST OF THEM MANNED A SHIP--
--AIMED IT FOR THE TERMINAL POINT-- INTO WHICH ALL MATTER WAS COLLAPSING--
AS THEY FLEW, THEY DIED--SUCCUMBED TO THE UNIVERSAL DECAY THAT HAD ROBBED THEIR WORLD OF LIFE.
THEY DIED--
--ALL BUT ONE.
ONE SURVIVOR-- ONE MAN, ONE MIND--
--WHO PLUNGED INTO THE SEETHING CAULDRON OF THE TERMINAL POINT, AND LISTEN--LISTEN--!
HEAR ME, LAST SON OF TAA--I AM THE SENTIENCE OF THE UNIVERSE!
THOUGH WE BOTH MUST DIE, WE NEED NOT DIE WITHOUT AN HEIR. COME, SURRENDER YOURSELF TO MY FIERY EMBRACE, AND LET US BECOME AS--
AND BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH! HE WAS REBORN, THAT LAST SURVIVOR, EMERGING IN THE UNIVERSE TO COME AS GALACTUS!
THAT IS WHAT I WRENCHED FROM GALACTUS'S MIND-- THE SECRET OF HIS BIRTH!
BUT DO YOU SEE? A VOICE IN ONE UNIVERSE--A HAND IN ANOTHER!
THERE IS A SPIRIT THAT GIVES LIFE TO UNIVERSES! A CONSCIOUSNESS DEEP IN THEIR VERY FABRIC! THEY THINK! FEEL! LIVE!

QUITE A DISCOVERY. QUITE A BREAKTHROUGH.

SO, KRONA. WHAT NOW?

NOW? I LEARN THE TRUTH!

THAT FOOL, THE GRANDMASTER--HE THOUGHT ME TRAPPED BY HIS DAMNABLE POWER-ITEMS! BUT I WIELD THEIR ENERGIES NOT, METRON--

--HERE, AT THE POINT WHERE TWO UNIVERSES--TWO COSMIC SENTIENCES--ARE JOINED TOGETHER!

NOW I HOLD THE UNIVERSES IN MY GRIP, FORCING THEM TO MERGE!

I WILL FORCE THEIR ANIMATING SPIRITS OUT--MAKE THEM GIVE UP THE SECRETS OF CREATION I HAVE SOUGHT FOR SO LONG!

I WILL FINALLY--FINALLY--KNOW!

AND...IF THE UNIVERSES CANNOT SURVIVE THE STRAIN YOU ARE PUTTING ON THEM?

PFF!: IF THEY DIE, THEY DIE. IT MATTERS NOT.

ALL THAT MATTERS--

--ALL THAT MATTERS--

--IS THE END OF MY LONG QUEST!

PROLOGUE ENDS.

IN THE NOTHINGESS OF THE TRANS-DIMENSIONAL VOID, TWO WORLDS--TWO UNIVERSES--CONVULSE. AND SHUDDER.

AND BEGIN TO CRUMBLE.

And Once Upon a Time, There was a Mighty Danger...

D.C. COMICS & MARVEL COMICS PROUDLY PRESENT:

THE BATTLE OF THE MILLENNIUM!

EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES: THE AVENGERS

THE WORLD'S GREATEST SUPER HEROES: THE JLA

UNITED AT LAST!

BOOK FOUR:

The BRAVE and the BOLD

ONE OF THOSE WORLDS.

NEW YORK.

RELAX, KID. YOU'RE SAFE NOW. AND EVERYTHING'S GONNA BE ALL RIGHT. IT'S ALL GONNA BE ALL RIGHT.

I HOPE.

--ENCV OPERATIONS CONTINUE--

FDNY

FDNY

--AS THE WORLDWIDE OUTBREAK OF EARTHQUAKES, FIRES AND WEATHER INVERSIONS ENTERS ITS THIRD--

THE OTHER WORLD.

ANOTHER NEW YORK.

M-MOVE IT GUYS! CAN'T H-HOLD--!

SURE YOU CAN, VIC! JUST A FEW SECONDS LONGER!

--ACUATION NEARLY COMPLETE, THANKS TO THE OUTSIDERS, INFINITY INC. AND THE TEEN--

EXCUSE THE INTERRUPTION, CAPTAIN, BUT THERE SEEM TO BE NEW DEVELOPMENTS.

WE SWITCH YOU NOW--

LOIS LANE LIVE FROM CBS-ONE

LANA LANG

--MISTS THAT HAD SWALLOWED METROPOLIS AND GOTHAM--

MAN! IT'S NOT SLOWING DOWN--!

THEN NEITHER DO WE, SPEEDBALL.

WE GO AS LONG AS IT TAKES!

--DO WE STOP IT, TANIA?

WE DON'T! THIS IS ALL JUST A SYMPTOM! ALL WE CAN DO IS TREAT IT--

--EARTH'S SUPERHUMANS PRESSED TO THE LIMIT, AROUND THE WORLD--

--UNTIL SOMEONE ELSE FINDS A CURE!

--HAVE BEGUN SHIFTING AND CHURNING.

THE TITANS ARE INVESTIGATING, BUT--

HOLY COW!

AS IF IT WASN'T BAD ENOUGH--NOW WE GOT DINOSAURS!

YEAH, CHANGELING, WE'RE NOT BLIND.

TIME FLIXES, WHAT NEXT...?

--IN SALISBURY PLAIN, WHERE STONEHENGE THREATENS TO TOPPLE, AND CAPTAIN BRITAIN WORKS TO PRESERVE IT--

--JERUSALEM, WHERE ISRAELI HERO SABRA PROTECTS THE WAILING WALL FROM THE LATEST WAVE OF--

--WORD OF THE AVENGERS?

THEY'RE WORKING ON THE PROBLEM. EVERYTHING IS UNDER CONTROL...

--STILL NO NEWS FROM THE JUSTICE LEAGUE?

COMMUNICATION WITH THEIR LUNAR HEADQUARTERS HAS BEEN SPOTTY. BUT WE'RE CONFIDENT THEY'RE GIVING THEIR FULL EFFORTS TO THE CRISIS--

--AND WILL HAVE A SOLUTION SOON.

I SAID--

MORGAN EDGE

--NO!
THIS IS MADNESS!
VISION...!
I'M GOING HOME! GOING TO FIND MY CHILDREN!
VISION, WE'RE DOING WHAT WE HAVE TO--THERE'S NO OTHER--
I DON'T ACCEPT THAT, CAPTAIN! AND NEITHER SHOULD YOU! IT VIOLATES EVERY PRINCIPLE OF LOGIC, OF REASON--!
YOU'VE BLINDLY ACCEPTED WHAT THE GRANDMASTER TOLD US--WHAT OUR OWN MEMORIES SAY IS FALSE! AND YOU'RE WILLING TO SACRIFICE BILLIONS TO THIS CRAZED IDEA OF A RESTORED REALITY--
--A REALITY WHERE THE THINGS THAT HAPPENED--THAT WE WITNESSED--
I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY'RE TRUE! I WON'T! NOT MY SONS! NOT--NNH!
CALM YOURSELF, AVENGER. LISTEN TO REASON.
IT'S--NOT--IT--MAYBE YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT SAVING INNOCENTS, BUT--
VISION, IT'S TRUE. IT'S ALL TRUE.
THE CHAOS-MAGIC ON THIS WORLD--IT'S SO MUCH STRONGER THAN AT HOME, AND I CAN SEE EVERYTHING. SEE THE WAY IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE.
REALITY AS WE KNOW IT IS WARPED--UNSTABLE--
--AND IT'S AFFECTING EVEN US. TWENTY MINUTES AGO, WE NEVER HAD CHILDREN. IN FIVE MINUTES, WE MAY NOT EVER HAVE BEEN MARRIED.
DON'T YOU SEE? WE CAN'T PRESERVE THE WAY THINGS ARE. BUT IF WE TRY TO RESTORE WHAT WAS--
BUT... THOMAS... AND WILLIAM...
A-ALL RIGHT. IF IT IS TRULY THE ONLY WAY. JUST... JUST TELL ME...

I'M FLATTERED, BUT I'M NOT SO SURE. THE CONFLICTING NATURE OF OUR TWO WORLDS HAS PUT US ON EDGE...FRAYED TEMPERS, JUDGMENTS...

I KNOW.

BUT YOU'RE STILL THE MAN FOR THE JOB.

I CONCUR.

WELL, ALL RIGHT. TEN POINTS FOR OUR SIDE!

ENOUGH, JAN. THIS ISN'T THE TIME.

I NEED TO BE CERTAIN. MANHUNTER--WILL THE LEAGUE FOLLOW MY LEAD? WITHOUT HESITATION?

I HAVE SCANNED OUR MINDS.

WE WILL.

ALL RIGHT.

WE MAY NOT KNOW WHAT WE'LL BE FACING, BUT WE CAN TRAIN TOGETHER, GET USED TO ONE ANOTHER'S STYLES.

PLUS, I HAVE A TRICK OR TWO IN MIND. BUT FIRST, TRANSPORTATION. AVENGERS, LEAGUE...

"...LET'S GET CRACKING."

THESE SENSORS--THEY ARE MOST UNUSUAL. THE CABLES ALONE ARE LIKE NOTHING I HAVE EVER SEEN...

ACES, VISION!

WITH YOUR COMPUTER-MIND, THIS'LL LET US REACT TO INCOMING DATA VIRTUALLY INSTANTANEOUSLY, MAKING ADJUSTMENTS AT THE SPEED OF THOUGHT...

I'VE GOT THE HANG OF IT NOW, AQUAMAN. A GOOD SHIP--YOU'RE SURE SHE'LL HANDLE THE STRESSES?

THIS IS AN IMPERIAL ATLANTEAN WARCRAFT, CAPTAIN. SHE'LL TAKE THE FULL PRESSURE OF THE OCEAN'S DEEPEST TRENCHES--AND MORE.

THEY SHOULD BE, J'ONN. IRON MAN AND ATOM WHIPPED THEM UP--THEY'RE BUILT TO RUN ON MY RINGS-POWER.

THEY'LL CONVERT MY RING-SCANS TO DATA, FEED THEM TO THE ONBOARD SYSTEM...

I AM LINKED, HANK. PROCESSING TEST READINGS. ARE YOU GETTING THE RESULTS YOU HOPED FOR?

GREEN ON ALPHA QUADRANT. GREEN ON BETA QUADRANT...

I WOULD HAVE SWORN THIS WAS A FOUR-DAY JOB, IRON MAN. BUT YOU'VE TRIPLED BOTH THRUST AND MANEUVERABILITY IN MERE HOURS--

MAKE IT TONY. I'M JUST SORRY WE HAD TO DIVERT MOST OF THE CANNON-POWER TO DO IT.

I'M NOT. I DON'T MUCH LIKE GUNS.

IN HERE, RAY?

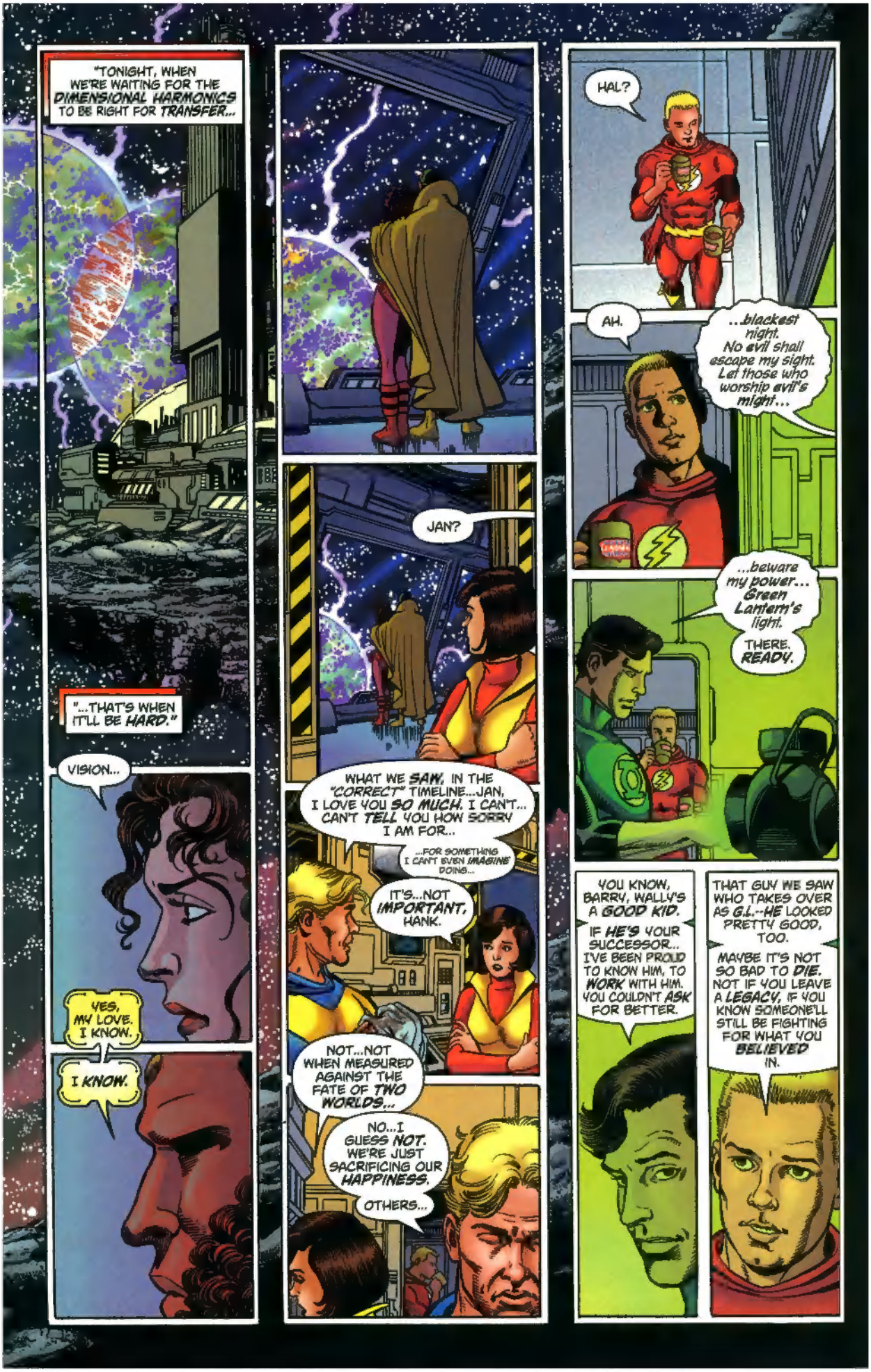
PERFECT!

NEXT, THE RED PLUG...

NEW READINGS...

YOU'RE VERY FOCUSED, WANDA.

YES. I'LL BE FINE AS LONG AS I HAVE SOMETHING TO DO.


"TONIGHT, WHEN WE'RE WAITING FOR THE DIMENSIONAL HARMONICS TO BE RIGHT FOR TRANSFER...
"...THAT'S WHEN IT'LL BE HARD."
VISION...
YES, MY LOVE. I KNOW.
I KNOW.
JAN?
WHAT WE SAW, IN THE "CORRECT" TIMELINE...JAN, I LOVE YOU SO MUCH. I CAN'T... CAN'T TELL YOU HOW SORRY I AM FOR...
...FOR SOMETHING I CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE DOING...
IT'S...NOT IMPORTANT, HANK.
NOT...NOT WHEN MEASURED AGAINST THE FATE OF TWO WORLDS...
NO...I GUESS NOT. WE'RE JUST SACRIFICING OUR HAPPINESS.
OTHERS...
HAL?
AH.
...blackest night. No evil shall escape my sight. Let those who worship evil's might...
...beware my power... Green Lantern's light.
THERE. READY.
YOU KNOW, BARRY, WALLY'S A GOOD KID.
IF HE'S YOUR SUCCESSOR... I'VE BEEN PROUD TO KNOW HIM, TO WORK WITH HIM. YOU COULDN'T ASK FOR BETTER.
THAT GUY WE SAW WHO TAKES OVER AS G.I.--HE LOOKED PRETTY GOOD, TOO.
MAYBE IT'S NOT SO BAD TO DIE. NOT IF YOU LEAVE A LEGACY. IF YOU KNOW SOMEONE'LL STILL BE FIGHTING FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVED IN.

This book was scanned by fleentrandt for DCP - if there is no tag on the last page its because someone else is trying to take credit for this scan, or is just being a cheap jerk.

IF ONLY THERE WAS ONE MORE DAY. ONE MORE COOKOUT WITH IRIS AND CAROL.
ONE MORE LOUD NIGHT OUT WITH OLLIE AND RALPH.
IT'S FUNNY. WHEN I FIRST MET YOU, I THOUGHT YOU WERE NICE ENOUGH, BUT AN ABSOLUTE CORNFED MIDWESTERN YOKEL.
THOSE JACKETS OF YOURS. THOSE AWFUL TIES...
HA!
AND I THOUGHT YOU WERE A SELF-SATISFIED COAST CITY SHARPIE, CONVINCED YOU WERE GOD'S GIFT TO WOMEN AND SLICKER THAN SPIT.
IT SEEMS LIKE SO LONG AGO...
I'M GOING TO SEE IF THE COMM-LINES ARE BETTER. TRY TO REACH IRIS ONE LAST TIME.
GIVE HER MY LOVE.
A DIRE PURPOSE, YES. BUT WHAT AN ASSEMBLAGE! THE FINEST OF TWO WORLDS. WITH OUR UNPARALLELED MIGHT, AND THY NOBLE FIRE...
YOUR MIGHT, HM? OUR FIRE?
I MIGHT REVERSE THOSE TWO. AFTER ALL, SUPERMAN AND YOU...
AYE. BUT I HAVE HIS MEASURE NOW, AND ANOTHER BOUT MIGHT WELL HOLD SURPRISES FOR THE...KRYPTONIAN, YOU SAID?
YES. EITHER WAY, YOU'RE RIGHT. I'M GLAD WE'RE ALLIES NOW.
I JUST WISH IT WASN'T...
YOU WANTED TO SEE ME?
LOOK, I'D LIKE TO APOLOGIZE AGAIN FOR SOME OF THE HARSH--
DON'T. YOU WEREN'T YOURSELF. NEITHER WAS I.
I KNOW. BUT I'LL CONFESS--I DO WORRY, SOMETIMES, ABOUT DOING TOO MUCH. DENYING HUMANITY FREEDOM OF CHOICE...
THAT'S WHAT MADE IT STING, ISN'T IT?
THAT DEEP DOWN, WE BOTH WORRY IT MIGHT BE TRUE.
IN MY CASE, THAT AS HARD AS THE AVENGERS FIGHT...I FEAR SOMETIMES IT MAY NEVER BE ENOUGH.
BUT THAT'S NOT WHY I ASKED FOR YOU.
I'LL NEED YOU TO TAKE THE BRUNT OF THE ATTACK. BUT EVEN YOU AREN'T A MATCH FOR THE POWER KRONA CAN BRING TO BEAR.
I'LL BE IN THE COMMAND SHIP, COORDINATING THE ATTACK. SO...
...I'D LIKE YOU TO CARRY THIS.
I'M...I'M HONORED, CAPTAIN. I'LL DO MY BEST TO WIELD IT WELL.
I JUST HOPE WE'RE READY.
WELL...

"...WE'LL KNOW SOON ENOUGH."
GO.
CH-CHK
VMMMMMM
TEKTEK TEK
THOU HAST MJOLNIR'S FULL POWER, IRON MAN!
YON DEVICE-- IT WILL WORK?
I HOPE SO, THOR.
IT'LL WORK.
BY RIGHTS, IT MAKES NO SENSE-- CONVERTING SPEED TO A VIBRATIONAL WAVE THAT SHIFTS THE TEMPORO-DIMENSIONAL LOCUS--
IT WOULDN'T WORK BACK HOME--
READY?
NOT YET.
SENSORS?
PAN-REALITY PROBES EXTENDED. TREADMILL ENERGIES MOUNTING-- MOUNTING--
KRONA'S SHIELDS ARE STRONG, BUT PERHAPS, IF WE STRIKE AT THE PRECISE--
AQUAMAN, WANDA-- WE WILL NEED FULL THRUST-- AND MAXIMUM PROBABILITY DISRUPTION--
--NOW!
AND IN AN INSTANT, THE ATLANTEAN SHIP SURGES FORWARD--
AND THE WALLS OF THE WATCHTOWER MELT AROUND THEM--
AND REALITY--

--CHANGES--
GREAT GUARDIANS!
HIS STRONGHOLD-- IT'S--
IT'S GALACTUS.
HE BUILT IT FROM THE REMAINS OF GALACTUS.

WITHIN...
HMP.
OF COURSE. THE FOOLS WOULD MAKE SOME ATTEMPT TO BAR MY PATH.
ARE YOU PREPARED?
ALWAYS.
HMMMMMMMMMM
THEIR WORLDS ARE IN MY GRIP--ALONG WITH ALL THEY HOLD DEAR.
I WILL RESERVE THE BULK OF MY POWER FOR THE TRUE GOAL. BUT IN THE MEANTIME--
--I CAN EASILY SPARE ENOUGH TO ENTHRALL A FEW OF THE WEAKER-MINDED DENIZENS OF THEIR DEMIMONDES--
ZKAM
ZKAM
ZKAM
CHOW
CHOW
CHOW
WHAT IN--?
"--AND PROVIDE A WELCOMING COMMITTEE."
FIRE! FIRE!
HAIL KRONA! IMMORTAL KRONA!
HE SHALL NEVER BE DESTROYED!
DESTROY THE INTRUDERS!
IN THE NAME OF NAJA-N--
IN THE NAME OF KRONA!

KILL FOR KRONA! DIE FOR KRONA!
THE INTRUDERS' SHIP! IT'S LANDING JUST OVER THAT RISE! WE'D BETTER--
GO COWER IN YOUR HOLES, HUMAN! WE HAVE NO NEED OF YOU!
WHO-EVER AND WHATEVER THEY ARE, THE SHOCK-TROOPS OF APOKOLIPS WILL MAKE SHORT WORK OF--
EH?
BY THE FURY OF THE INFERNAL FIREPITS! HOW--?
WHO--?

AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!

AND NOW, LET THE CRY RING OUT!

LET IT SHAKE THE GROUND AND [redacted] THE FIRMAMENT ABOVE--

--THAT KRONA SHALL KNOW--WE COME FOR HIM!

AND JUSTICE LEAGUE, UH--LAMBASTE!

SFF

SO.

HE REALLY EXPECTS THIS TO STOP US?

AHH!

MINDLINK ESTABLISHED.

CAPTAIN AMERICA--YOU ARE IN COMMAND.

THANK YOU, J'ONN.

ALL RIGHT, EVERYONE--WE'RE ON UNKNOWN TERRAIN AND UNDER ASSAULT.

FIRST PRIORITIES--BEACHHEAD AND [redacted]

HUU!

UHH!

WONDER WOMAN, GOLIATH, AQUAMAN--

GET THE ENEMY'S ATTENTION--AND HOLD IT!

NO PROBLEM!

LANTERN, THOR--SPLIT THEIR RANKS!

ATOM, VISION--I WANT YOU ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE LINES, FINDING OUT WHAT'S NEXT!

I'LL SAY THIS--THE MAN [redacted] WHAT HE WANTS. HE ALWAYS THIS IMPRESSIVE, VISION?

ALWAYS.

HANK! TAKE AWAY THEIR FIREPOWER! WANDA--SEE IF YOU CAN SENSE ANY ENERGY-FLUXES--
--PREDICT THE [redacted] ASSAULTS BEFORE THEY HIT!
I'LL DO MY BEST, CAP!
IRON MAN, AQUAMAN--
--MOLOIDS AT TWO O'CLOCK!
THIS IS SO STRANGE--GETTING COMMANDS LIKE THIS, RIGHT INSIDE MY SKULL...
YOU GET USED TO IT, IN TIME.
LANTERN, DIANA, J'ONN--HUMANOIDS TO YOUR LEFT! GET THEIR SPECS [redacted] MY MEMORIES!
SUPERMAN, THOR--
--COMING IN FROM THE NORTH, DON'T KNOW THEM--
DON'T WORRY, CAPTAIN--THEY WON'T BE AROUND LONG ENOUGH FOR IT TO MATTER!
AND WHERE CAN I GET ONE OF THESE SHIELDS--IT'S FANTASTIC!
ENJOY IT WHILE THOU CANST, SUPERMAN.
THERE IS NONE OTHER LIKE IT IN ALL THE WORLDS.
OKAY, WE'RE HOLDING 'EM OFF--
--BUT THAT'S NOT ENOUGH! FLASH, WASP, EAST AND WEST--
--SEE IF WE CAN GO AROUND, RATHER THAN THROUGH!
SOME SORT OF CABLES, GENERATING A FIELD-WALL--PROBABLY LETHAL!
I WOULDN'T WANT TO TRY GOING THROUGH IT--

BUT IT'S IRREGULAR, AS IF IT'S [redacted] HASTILY BUILT!
THERE ARE GAPS, WHERE A SINGLE MAN COULD--
OH. WELL, GIVE A SHOUT IF YOU NEED ANY HELP.
GOOD.
BATMAN, I WANT YOU THROUGH THAT FIELD--FIND THE CONTROL STATION FOR IT AND SHUT IT--
BATMAN?
HE WON'T, CAP, BUT DON'T WORRY. HE'S LIKE THAT WITH ALL OF--
--HUH?
THAT NOISE--THAT LIGHT!
WHAT ON EARTH--?
IT'S SOME SORT OF WAVE, CAP--RIPPLING THROUGH THE WHOLE AREA!
BUT IT'S WILD, CHAOTIC--IT'S NOT ANYTHING KRONA COULD HAVE--
--EH?
HUH? WHERE--?
[redacted] SOMEBODY TELL [redacted] NEVER TO EAT ANCHOVY PIZZA RIGHT BEFORE BED AGAIN--!
IT'S NO DREAM, CLINT! I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS, BUT YOU'RE HERE, WANDA'S GONE--
IT'S SOME SORT OF CHRONAL INSTABILITY! THE ENERGY THAT'S BEEN MAKING OUR WORLDS GO CRAZY--IT'S REACHED HERE, NOW--
--AND IT'S AFFECTING US! OUR UNIFORMS, OUR ROSTERS--!

--THERE IS MORE IMPORTANT WORK TO DO.
WITH THE ENERGIES I AM DRAWING FROM THE TWO UNIVERSES, THEY WILL NOT REMAIN COHERENT MUCH LONGER--
--NOR WILL THIS OASIS BETWEEN THEM.
BUT I HAVE LOCATED THE UNIVERSAL AVATARS--THE CONSCIOUSNESSES OF THE TWO REALMS--AND SEIZED THEM.
I MUST HAVE MY ANSWERS SOON--BEFORE THEY ARE ANNIHILATED! AID ME, METRON--
--HELP ME FORCE THEM TO AN ACCOUNTING!
NO...
NO, I DON'T BELIEVE I WILL.
WHAT? DON'T MAKE JOKES, METRON! ARE THE LED ME THE AVENGERS UNIVERSE, HELPED ME SEE ITS POSSIBILITIES!
YOU CANNOT BACK OUT NOW. ARE WE NOT BOTH TRUTH-SEEKERS?
ARE WE?
EH?
ASK YOURSELF WHAT YOU TRULY SEEK, KRONA. ASK YOURSELF HONESTLY. IS IT TRUTH? ANSWERS? OR IS IT CONQUEST?
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT, I LEAVE UP TO YOU. BUT I SHALL BE WATCHING.
AND BELIEVE ME...
BOOM

"...I WILL BE VERY INTERESTED IN THE OUTCOME..."
BATMAN TO CAPTAIN AMERICA. THE FIELD GENERATORS ARE DOWN -- A FEW EXPLOSIVE CHARGES TOOK CARE OF THEM. SEND THE OTHERS THROUGH.
--TO--
=NN=
I'M SCOUTING FURTHER, TO [redacted] IF I CAN FIND AN UNDEFENDED PATH TO--
'ALLO, MON AMI! ZAT IS YOUR JAW -- AND ZIS [redacted] ZE FOOT OF BATROC--
--BATROC, ZE LEAPAIR!
UHH!
ZE VOICE IN MA TETE -- MY HEAD -- TELLS ME YOU ARE A MOS' SKILLFUL FIGHTER. AN' BATROC, [redacted] LOVES TO MEET ZE SKILLFUL FIGHTERS!
LET US SEE WHICH OF US IS ZE MOST SKILLFUL, HEIN?
AHR-
AHR-

--AIIIYOWWW!
WHERE'D THOSE GUYS COME FROM? WHERE'D THAT ENERGY-BARRIER COME FROM?
COME TO THINK OF IT, WHERE'D WE COME FROM?
WELL, IT COULD [redacted] THE ENERGY-BARRIER'S PART OF THE AUTOMATIC DEFENSES, AND--
OH, WHY AM I EVEN [redacted]
THE WHYS AND WHEREFORES MATTER NOT, MALLEABLE ONES!
WE HAVE AN OBSTACLE BEFORE US--
--AND IT SHALL NOT STAND!
YEAH? HOW'S THIS FOR AN OBSTA[redacted] YOU BIG--
AIHH! MY EARS!
SCREAMING MIMI--!
WHO CARES WHO SHE IS, HERC? SHE STEALS MY GIMMICK -- SHE'S TOAST!
AAAAAAH!
VERY IMPRESSIVE, BLACK CANARY.
YOU HAVE DOWNED A POSTURING MORON. WILL YOU DO AS WELL, I WONDER--
--WITH THE REST OF US?!
WE...CAN TRY, FELIX FAUST!

YOUR ENERGY-WALL, FOR INSTANCE--
--WILL ONLY PROTECT YOU... AS LONG AS IT STANDS!
GOOD, RED TORNADO, GOOD! KEEP IT UP!
THE REST OF YOU, THROUGH THE GAP! WE'RE TWO LEVELS IN-- LET'S MAKE IT THREE!
ESTABLISH A BEACHHEAD, AND SPREAD OUT FROM THERE! WE'LL DO THE SAME WITH THE NEXT RING OF DEFENSES--
--AND THE NEXT -- UNTIL WE'RE IN!
YOU HEARD THE MAN, GANG!
WE GO--
--AND WE DON'T SLOW DOWN!
WE'VE FACED LONG ODDS BEFORE-- AND BEAT 'EM!
WE'LL DO IT AGAIN-- WE ALWAYS DO!
SUPERMAN! DOST THOU NEED AID?
I'M... NNH!E...ALL RIGHT, THOR!
BUT THE RED TORNADO...

I SEE THY CONCERN! THE ENERGY-STORM--IT DOTH THREATEN TO OVERWHELM HIM!
THE LORD OF THE LIVING LIGHTNING, THEN, SHALL EASE HIS BURDEN!
COME, POWER MOST UNHOLY! COME--
--OBEY THY MASTER!
UH-OH.
WHIRLWIND AT 4 O'CLOCK, GOLDILOCKS! BUT NOT TO WORRY-- I GOT YOUR BACK!
YEAH? SO, PURPLE TWERP--
GHAKK
--WHO'S GOT YOURS?
UH. GOOD QUESTION.
IRON MAN?
WONDY?
ANYONE?
WELL, NOT MEANING TO BUTT IN OR ANYTHING, HAWKEYE--
--BUT WILL I DO?
WELL...
...SEEIN' AS HOW YOU ASKED NICELY...
THOSE TWO. LAUGHING. DEVIL-MAY-CARE. INSPIRING.
THAT WON'T DO.

THAT WON'T DO AT ALL.
WH--?
BARRY...?
FLASH?
HAWKEYE?
DON'T FALTER, PEOPLE! DON'T LOSE [illegible]NTUM! THAT'S WHAT THEY'RE HOPING FOR! WE'LL...WE'LL MOURN OUR FRIENDS LATER!
WE'LL MOURN YOU LATER, CLINT.
PUSH ON! FOR THEM! FOR OUR WORLDS! FIGHT!
NO! HE'S--
YOU DIDN'T!
HAL?
YOU--
HUH?
--NO!
?
SHAKKATOOOM!

AND THEY DO.

THEY DO.

THEIR ENEMIES MULTIPLY SEEMINGLY WITHOUT LIMIT. AND STILL THEY FIGHT.

THEIR OWN NUMBERS SHIFT AND CHANGE WITHOUT

AND STILL THEY FIGHT.

CHAOS ASSAILS THEM ON ALL SIDES, AND ANY LESSER HEROES WOULD BE OVERWHELMED.

BUT CAPTAIN AMERICA'S KEEN MIND COMPENSATES FOR EVERY NEW SURPRISE.

J'ONN J'ONZZ'S TELEPATHY TRANSMITS HIS ORDERS INSTANTLY TO WEARYING CHAMPIONS AND NEW ARRIVALS ALIKE--

--AND STILL THEY FIGHT, DRIVING FORWARD, EVER FORWARD--
CAPTAIN MARVEL--
--LOOK OUT!
AHHH!
THANKS!
THANKS!
NICE!
WHO DID THAT?!
IT WAS SERSI, FIRESTORM!
NOW PICK A TARGET AND GET BACK IN THE GAME!
RRRAAAUGH!
GO AHEAD, PUNY COSTUME-MEN! BLAST HULK AGAIN! BLAST HULK AGAIN, AND HULK WILL--
--HUH?!
AWPP!
L-LOOK-- THERE'S NO YAZZIN' NEED TO--
EH? WHAT'S--
NTHUU!

OH, NO!
THE MIND-LINK, IT'S GONE!
J'ONN?
MANHUNTER? J'ONN? ARE YOU THERE? J'ONN!
BLAST IT, CHRONAL CHAOS GOT HIM. I'D BETTER GET OUT THERE, AND--
YOU'RE GOING NOWHERE, CAPTAIN.
WHO?
I'M PROMETHEUS. I'VE JUST UPLOADED BATMAN'S FIGHTING SKILLS.
THAT'LL BE MORE THAN ENOUGH TO DEFEAT YOU.
OH?
HE WAS FAST. AND QUITE SKILLED, FOR SUCH A--
YOU IN THE CAPE.
YOU DOWNED BATROC.
NOW FACE US.
GOOD DAY, BATMAN.
COULD YOU PERHAPS USE AN EXTRA HAND?
OR MAYBE SIX?
IF YOU'VE GOT NOTHING BETTER TO DO...
I--I BEGIN TO SEE NOW. WHAT METRON MUST HAVE BEEN HINTING AT.
NO, I AM NOT MERELY A TRUTH-SEEKER. FOR NOW THAT THE TRUTH IS IN MY GRASP, I FIND THAT IT IS NOT ENOUGH!
DENIED ME! UNIVERSES, WORLDS, HEROES, ALL--DENIED MY GOAL, MY POWERS!
AND YOU MUST PAY FOR THAT!

THE CITADEL!
SOMETHING'S-- SOMETHING'S HAPPENING--!
WE'LL GET THERE! WE'LL GET THERE!
HAH!
UHH!
AH-AH!
BACK OFF, YOU TWO!
YA-HAHH!
GHKK
HM?
THE SHIELD--?
HUH? WHO'RE YOU?
NEURAL CHAFF. HYPNOTIC LIGHTS. PRE-PROGRAMMED SKILLS.
TRY FIGHTING THE WEHRMACHT, MISTER--
--IT TEACHES YOU FOCUS!
UHHHH!

AND ON IT GOES.
THEY SMASH GUARD TOWERS, GUN EMPLACEMENTS, FORCE-FIELD WALLS.
EVERY VICTORY HARD-FOUGHT.
EVERY INCH OF GROUND PAID FOR IN SWEAT AND BLOOD.
AND WHEN IT LOOKS, FOR A MOMENT--
THERE BE HOPE--
WE'VE GOT THEM ON THE RUN.
YES, AND--
WAIT. AT THE CITADEL! WHAT'S--

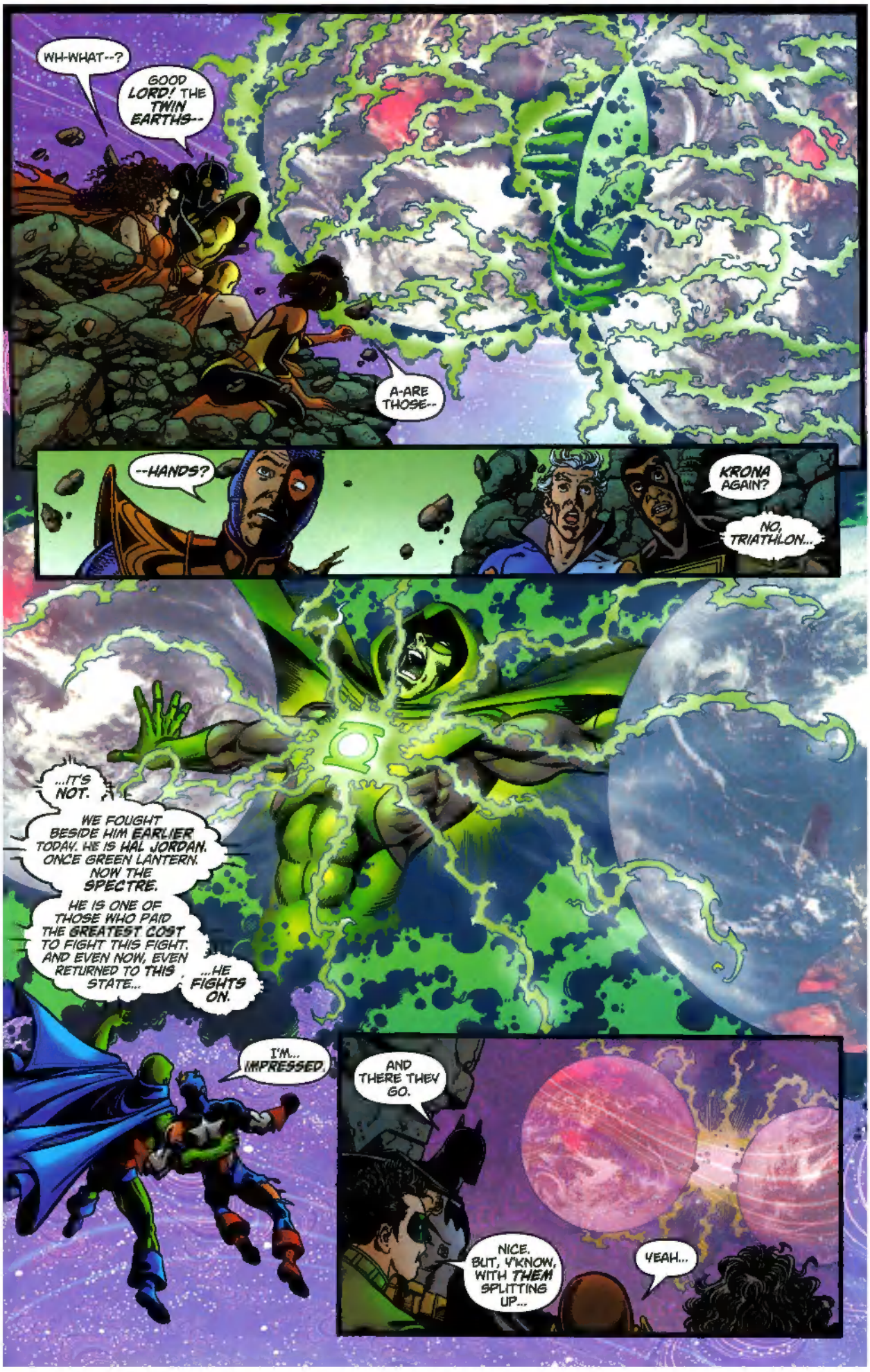
WOW.
JUST...WOW. THIS [redacted] IRON MAN--THE SHEER POWER OF IT--AND HOW FAST YOU CAME UP WITH IT--
--I'M JEALOUS AS HELL.
YOU'RE JEALOUS?
TELL ME WHERE I CAN GET ONE OF THOSE RINGS, FRIEND...
AAAAH!
THE ROCKS--THE GROUND--
THE WHOLE CITADEL'S CRUMBLING, COMING APART--!
WE'VE ONLY GOT [redacted] MINUTES LEFT--AND NOT MANY!
HAH! OUR MASTER'S MOMENT OF TRIUMPH [redacted] UPON US!
CRUSH THEM, MY UNDERSEA LEGIONS! CRUSH THEM IN THE NAME OF ATTUMA, BARBARIAN WARLORD OF THE UNCHARTED--

H-HUH?
NOW WHAT IN THE NAME OF LITTLE GREEN APPLES--?
MARRINA?
YOU!
IT WAS YOU, WASN'T IT?
YES, PLASTIC MAN. I HAVE A... MEASURE OF CONTROL OVER OCEAN LIFE. THEIR MINDS WERE MORE COMPLEX THAN YOUR AVERAGE [redacted]ALIBUT--
--AND IT WAS... EXHAUSTING...BUT I MANAGED TO SHUT THEM [redacted]
GLAD I AM, THEN, THAT I AM ONLY HALF ATLANTEAN. EVEN SO, MY HEAD POUNDS LIKE THE TREAD OF GIGANTO...
SORRY, NAMOR. IT WAS THE ONLY--
UH, GUYS? GUYS?!
KRRRR
UH-OH.
[redacted] THAT'S WHAT I [redacted] GONNA SAY, [redacted] I COULDN'T THINK [redacted] THE WORDS...

SO HOW'RE WE DOING, WANDA?
IT'S HARD...HARD TO TELL!
I THINK...WE'RE BLOCKING KRONA FROM BRINGING MORE REINFORCEMENTS, BUT...
...THERE MAY BE ONLY SECONDS LEFT...
WRAM WRAM WRAM
BLAST IT!
THIS IS IT--THE LAST WALL, KRONA'S FINAL LINE OF DEFENSE!
BUT IT'S ENERGIZED--
--SOME KIND OF POWERFUL FORCE-FIELD--
--AND I CAN'T-- CAN'T--
YOUR STRUGGLES ARE FUTILE, STORMGOD.
YOU CANNOT STAND AGAINST US ALL-- YOU WILL FALL HERE.
AYE?
PERHAPS-- PERHAPS I SHALL, BUT--
SUPERMAN!
EH?
DO THOU WELL WITH IT!

KRRMMBLL
FOOLS. POOR, DELUDED FOOLS.
YOU THOUGHT ME DISTRACTED, INATTENTIVE TO YOUR ATTACKS. YOU WERE WRONG.
I KNOW ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED-- ALL THAT CAME HERE, ALL THAT FOUGHT, ALL THAT FELL. A MERE FRACTION OF MY MIND OBSERVED EVERYTHING.
AND THIS IS THE LAST OF YOU. HELPLESS AGAINST MY MIGHT.
YOU GAVE YOUR ALL TO GET THIS FAR. BUT YOU ARE FINISHED. FINISHED FOREVER.
HIS VOICE HAS A RASP OF TRIUMPH TO IT, OF CHALLENGE, AS IF EXPECTING A REPLY. ONE MORE ASSAULT. ONE MORE FOE.
BUT HE KNOWS THERE WILL BE NO ANSWER.

I'M...NOT SURE, BUT I THINK...WHATEVER THIS WAS, IT'S DONE.
YES, WALLY. THE CHRONAL CHAOS IS FADING.
MY HAND... GONE AGAIN...
ALL THE BODIES--OUR ALLIES, FALLEN VILLAINS--THEY'VE FADED AWAY.
YEAH.
LOOKS LIKE IT'S JUST US...
...JUST THE GUYS WHO STARTED OUT ON THIS WHOLE SHEBANG.
AND IF ANYONE KNOWS A GOOD SUPER-STRONG CHIROPRACTOR... NFF!
WHY'S EVERYONE SO SOMBER? WE WON RIGHT?
YOU WEREN'T HERE FOR MOST OF IT, FLASH. SO MANY FALLEN--
--SO MANY DEAD--
MAYBE NOT, IRON MAN. THERE'S STILL A CHANCE...
HUH? HEY!
CAP! AND THE BIG GREEN GUY!
THE OTHER BIG GREEN GUY!
YES. AND AS I WAS SAYING...
REALITY IS REORDERING ITSELF. WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT THAT WILL BRING. BUT EVEN IF THIS IS THE COST--
--WE CAN TAKE SOLACE IN THE FACT THAT WE DID WHAT WAS NECESSARY.
AND THAT IT IS OVER.
MAYBE NOT. LOOK.
HM?
THERE, IN THE SKY--
--SOME SORT OF RIPPLE--


WH-WHAT--?
GOOD LORD! THE TWIN EARTHS--
A-ARE THOSE--
--HANDS?
KRONA AGAIN?
NO, TRIATHLON...
...IT'S NOT.
WE FOUGHT BESIDE HIM EARLIER TODAY. HE IS HAL JORDAN. ONCE GREEN LANTERN. NOW THE SPECTRE.
HE IS ONE OF THOSE WHO PAID THE GREATEST COST TO FIGHT THIS FIGHT. AND EVEN NOW, EVEN RETURNED TO THIS STATE...
...HE FIGHTS ON.
I'M... IMPRESSED.
AND THERE THEY GO.
NICE. BUT, Y'KNOW, WITH THEM SPLITTING UP...
YEAH...

"...WHAT HAPPENS TO THIS PLACE?"
SUPERMAN?
HE'S AN ANDROID, I KNOW. BUT I DON'T HEAR ANY INTERNAL ACTIVITY--PUMPS, FLUIDS, INTERNAL RELAYS, POWER... NOTHING.
HE GAVE UP ALL HE HAD, WITHOUT HESITATION--
AND WOULD HAVE GIVEN MORE, HAD HE BEEN ABLE.
BUT HE HATH WEATHERED MUCH, AND MAY WEATHER THIS AS WELL. WE DO HAVE SKILLED MEN OF SCIENCE, AND THEY WILL SEE TO HIM.
SUPERMAN! AVENGERS! JOIN THE REST OF US--SWIFTLY! I AM SENSING AN OVERWHELMING ENERGY-SURGE!
HUH?
WHOA--THE GROUND! EARTHQUAKE! OR, UH, SPACEQUAKE, OR WHATEVER...
--AND WE DARE NOT REMAIN!
THERE'S YOUR ANSWER ABOUT THIS PLACE, LANTERN.
REALITY'S REBUILDING ITSELF...
...AND GALACTUS IS RE-FORMING!
LET'S GET OUT OF HERE.
HERE, THOR.
I'LL--
NNNFF!
WHAT?
ALLOW ME.
THERE IS AN ENCHANTMENT 'PON MY HAMMER, LAID BY MY FATHER ODIN. IT IS NOT...EASILY LIFTED, BY OTHERS.
I HELD IT BEFORE--
MY FATHER IS STERN, SUPERMAN. BUT NOT STUPID. A VERY FEW WORTHIES HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO OVERCOME THE SPELL, IN DESPERATE HOURS.
BUT KNOW THIS. PERHAPS IT WAS BUT BRIEFLY...BUT IT WAS IN GOOD HANDS.